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ABSTRACT

Lessons learned from Onderwijs un Sociaal Milieu (OSM), or Education and Social Origin, the largest compensation and enrichment program ever developed in The Netherlands, are described in this paper. Although the program did not raise lower class students' standardized test scores to the national level, the program had overly ambitious goals and the advantages of structure and efficiency. Conclusions are that: (1) The OSM had a limited scope and should involve more schools and other bureaucratic and professional partners; (2) demographic circumstances have changed drastically since OSM began; (3) successful implementation is no guarantee for better student achievement; and (4) diversification of research activities should not be confused with major breakthroughs into the outlines and principles of OSM. The paradox of OSM may be that the strength of its explicit rationality in outline and infrastructure lessened its ability to adequately respond to the ideals of equity in a rapidly changing school population that needs frequent diagnosis of deprivation and underachievement. (Contains 20 references.) (LMI)

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BETTER RESEARCH, BETTER PROGRAMMES?

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"New strategies have to be developed and implemented. Sophisticated research has to accompany these activities." These concluding remarks have been made by G.W. Meijnen in his review of the closing report of the Dutch Education and Environment Project (Meijnen, 1990, 94). Meijnen elaborates briefly on ambitions, gains, and disappointments of the O.S.M. project that he holds for being "well-organised, well-structured and well-thought out .." (Ibid, 93).

A relevant question here is, of course: what strategies for better projects in terms of outcomes? What type of research on compensation programmes is most welcome? What lessons can be learnt out of the O.S.M. period?

The questions are simple. It takes much more to deliver answers. I just want to repeat and summarize some of the issues that have been raised by others, and give some suggestions for a fruitful liaison between research and practical work in compensation and enrichment programmes in the near future.

It is a well-known fact that the impact of research into the O.S.M. project has been quite substantial. There is widespread consensus about the "theory-driven" (Scheerens, 1987) and "technological" (Slavenburg, 1989) orientation within O.S.M. during the period 1974-1987. Scheerens, in his review of compensatory education projects in The Netherlands, observes that "all parts of the O.S.M. program have been built on insights gathered from the available social scientific and educational literature" (Scheerens, 1987, 59). Moreover, "the attempts to give the innovation program a scientific basis were more pronounced than in the case of the other larger compensatory and enrichment programs" (Ibid, 65). This is true both for the curriculum development strategies and for the evaluation of results. As far as evaluation is concerned, success criteria were worked out in detail in the early years and applied rigorously in the final years of the program (Slavenburg, 1986).

No doubt that the profile of O.S.M. has a clear foundation in research. Research has been a respectful companion of the whole set of O.S.M. activities. Nevertheless,

the question raised by Meynen remains: was it sophisticated enough? The answer can not be derived automatically from the outcomes of the project. If so, research was not sophisticated for the simple reason that the outcomes were somewhat disappointing. As we all know, the key issue was a substantial improvement of the school achievement level of pupils and in this respect the final results were not encouraging. Of course, this empirical fact is no proof whatsoever that research was not sophisticated. So far it suggests that the summative evaluation of the project was taken very seriously. While the project team of O.S.M. was responsible, it denies that evaluation needs to be external for being objective.

One might assume that these project outcomes underline the limitations of educational change. Compensation and enrichment programmes normally end up in slight improvements of the intellectual development of lower class kids. The success criteria of O.S.M. were quite ambitious: success relied on the question whether or not scores on standardized achievement tests for this subpopulation equalize national average. A high risk of failure was introduced. Nevertheless, alternatives for these success criteria -whether less ambitious or progress oriented- had many disadvantages. Some could not even be considered for the simple reason that comprehension of the pupil characteristics in the initial phases of the project was rather limited. The question what results determine the demarcation-line between success and failure cannot be solved in principle. It is far more interesting to see what type of reasoning is explicitly introduced in order to decide about the success criteria. Slavenburg argues that "it is a clear prediction of the intended effects, effects that are normally not realised by lower class pupils, effects that were expected to have the potential to be realised by a multifacet and long term exposure by the O.S.M. programmes, effects that are clear in its practical consequences (..), and effects that can be traced without complex (quasi-)experiments" (Slavenburg, 1990, 107; translation WF). Nobody can deny the logic of introducing effects that cannot be realised in a "normal" situation, and have a potential to be realised in an experimental situation. Now the project has ended and the results are somewhat disappointing, Slavenburg argues that it is better to keep these criteria in mind and explore new ways of improving the attainment level instead

of withdrawal by introducing less ambitious goals. What kind of new ways are we talking about?

In the final report of O.S.M. many lessons for future compensation and enrichment programmes have been introduced. These concern the improvement of intellectual skills and scholastic attitudes as well as a new impetus for curriculum development, implementation, evaluation and diffusion. These new guidelines remain within the framework of O.S.M. compensation and enrichment strategies. It is suggested to keep the philosophy intact and rethink or change important details of the curriculum development strategy with the O.S.M. experience in mind. A sophisticated effort in structured programmes annex careful implementation. Roughly the same, but better. Moreover, it is argued that the principles of parent involvement programmes should be critically analysed and reshaped.

No clear evidence is available yet in international literature about better curriculum development strategies. For this reason the O.S.M. strategy - and its eventual successors - is open for criticism. Nevertheless, compared to other large scale compensation programmes, O.S.M. had the advantages of structure and efficiency[1]. Effectiveness may rely heavily on efficiency. And research can play a crucial role in order to work on a 'technology' for developing and implementing various programmes, methods, valid instruments for measuring progress or success, etc.

However, many difficult questions remain. More options should be explored for new compensation and enrichment programmes that are guided by sophisticated educational research. We want to discuss some issues here that have at least some importance in the Rotterdam educational setting.

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1 For example, an OESO report on Headstart states that "There is a growing concern with the apparant lack of overall efficiency, coordination, and articulation between programs (..) Evaluations show a variety of interpretations of program purposes and policies at the local level." (OESO, p. 147)

1.

O.S.M. had a limited scope. It was an experiment. New initiatives for compensation and enrichment programmes ought to deal with more schools and other (bureaucratic and professional) partners. Much stronger than with O.S.M. success or failure depends also on a long-lasting participation of a maximum of schools. Normally, the implication is that more emphasis is needed for legitimizing these efforts. This context is not necessarily productive for a unique orientation on a rational-empirical model, R-D-D in particular, as has been adopted by O.S.M.

Leune (1987) observes that within educational policies there is often tension or conflict between arguments that are based on professionalism or 'expertise' (and are initiated by social scientific arguments) and arguments that are based on democratisation, and derived directly from interests and perception of practitioners, teachers in particular. One may guess that democratisation is relatively important in a general compensation and enrichment program if we compare with O.S.M. that did not strive for a maximum but an optimum in participation. Against this background, the question is whether elements of a model other than the rational-empirical type should be introduced.[2] And if so, is another research-instrumentation needed?

In a new sketch for compensation and enrichment programmes in Rotterdam, an inner-city advisory committee suggests to introduce school-centered evaluation procedures: much emphasis is given to school reports about the perceived cost-effectiveness of their educational practices. This may imply that research activities change partly in scope, precision and/or representation. If research is school-policy oriented in this strict sense, one might question whether the methodological criteria that have been central to the O.S.M. evaluation will be sustained in every respect. Cronbach says that in policy-oriented methodologies quality is not the ultimative criterium; ".. an evaluation should aim to be comprehensible, correct and complete, and credible to partisans on all sides" (Cronbach, 1980, cited by Scheerens, 1983, p. 54). Whether or not other methodological principles for evaluation are being

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[2] One can think about the normative-reeducative model (Bennis, Benne & Chin, 1970).

introduced remains to be seen. Apparently, dilemmas arise as soon as the (research) instrumentation of compensation and enrichment programmes relies more on how to find effective ways to commit as many partners as possible, schools and teachers included, to a long lasting participation.

2.

Demographic circumstances in Rotterdam have changed drastically since O.S.M. started. In particular the ethnic factor has gained importance. In some areas of the city of Rotterdam the proportion of migrant families has risen dramatically to a third or more in less than a decade. Many preliminary reports of O.S.M. mention this phenomenon. The O.S.M. staff always held the view that their programmes were not responding specifically to ethnic minority kids. During all important phases of O.S.M. these categories of pupils were kept out of evaluation. It is quite an understandable position if one takes into account that continuity in objectives and target groups were essential to the project' main outline and principles. Rapid and substantial reorientations in target groups might disrupt essential conditions for clear insights into the potentialities of the project. A summative evaluation may be endangered by such unforeseen modifications.

Nevertheless, there is the argument by Scheerens and Creemers that ".. in a period when a school's external environment induces all kinds of new demands, it is quite understandable that a lot of energy should be spent on input characteristics like the redesign of curricula, the acquisition of new teaching materials, etc" (Scheerens and Creemers, 1989, p.271). This statement has the school in mind, but it can easily be applied to projects, O.S.M. in particular. It is suggested by the authors that one has to find a balance between investments for environmental adjustment and activities that are directly linked to the outlines of the project. Although it has never been proven that O.S.M. activities have been "disrupted" significantly by the entrance of other target groups, such as migrant kids, the question for compensation and enrichment programmes remains: should environmental adjustment take place and modify the project's aim and research activities in one way or another? How harmful is environ-

mental adjustment to summative evaluation? How harmful is environmental non-adjustment to the aims of the project?

3.

Successful implementation is no guarantee for better student achievements. Sometimes, better implementations of programmes is rather useless if one introduces the standard of higher achievements of pupils. It has been observed within O.S.M. that the relationship between attainment and implementation level is almost non-existent (Klaasman, 1989, 257). This conclusion raises many questions nowadays, of course. One question is about the valuable aspects of a strong orientation toward curriculum development per se. Another question is about the variation of project activities. It is a well-known fact that O.S.M. was not a one-sided curriculum development strategy. It had, for instance, also a strong emphasis on parent involvement; unfortunately this part of O.S.M. was rather unsuccessful in terms of implementation. Still, curriculum development was central to O.S.M. activities.

For future scenarios of compensation and enrichment programmes one has to face the decision whether or not to strive for more variation into the types of interventions that should be prioritised. Empirical evidence on school effectiveness tends to suggest that a combination of interventions within the school organisation and instruction process is needed. O.S.M. offered a sequence of activities that have been carefully looked after in terms of implementation. Nevertheless, teacher training in instruction processes has, for a variety of reasons, been one of the weakest sides of intervention. It is relevant enough to rethink efforts for effective interventions into the instruction process in the micro-world of classroom activities.

Moreover, diversification may be also inspired by the assumption that different interventions have differential effects for different categories of disadvantaged pupils. [3] As soon as diagnosis of underachievement and deprivation differs for boys and girls, for indigenous and non-indigenous groups of pupils, uniformity of therapies may

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[3] It should be underlined that we are not talking about improvement of pupil achievement in general, but only for deprived pupils in class and ethnic terms. Equity is central to analysis here.

be unwise.

The introduction of a diversified set of compensation and enrichment programmes is not without risk. The project may easily loose its profile and structure. Nevertheless, flexibility and diversity may be essential ingredients for effective interventions. The dilemma is obvious, as we can learn from the American Head Start and Follow Up programmes. While it was recommended, as mentioned before, to promote efficiency, coordination and continuity, the criticism has also been that "many programs operated too long on virtually the same assumption. (..) Yet times have changed" (OESO, 1980, p.147).

The preferable position is to find a better balance between continuity and flexibility. One suggestion is to introduce experimental studies as well, that are controlled and backed by university research groups (see Stringfield and Pollack, 1989, p.292). The mainstream of a distinct set of well defined programme objectives should be combined with rather small-scale (quasi-) experimental studies. These studies may deepen our understanding of the effectiveness of simulation programmes, computerized instruction, teacher training into the functionality of language acquisition, etc. The "bet" would be that the success of a well defined curriculum strategy for improving attainment of pupils at risk (as explored in O.S.M.) is conditioned by additional instructional strategies in classrooms.

4.

Diversification of (research) activities should not be confused with major breakthroughs into the outlines and principles of the (former) O.S.M. project. Radical new options should be inspired by recent insights into determinants of academic underachievement. Let us mention some examples.

One major change would be to depict other age groups as targets for intervention. Ideas have been put forward already about pre-school intervention models; well defined and well structured interventions into the child-parent (in particular child-mother) cognitive and intellectual communication. Research findings initiated these reorientations in two ways. First of all, there is overwhelming empirical evidence from

O.S.M. that the best predictor for attainment in different grades in primary education is the child's starting position in primary education (De Visser, 1989). Thus, manipulation of this starting position is very important and relies on pre-school programmes. Secondly, Leseman (1989) in his analysis of O.S.M. on the basis of recent international literature, assumes that several distinguished aspects of the class situation of families with pupils at risk should be seen as prime movers of underachievement; his argument is that linguistic and meta-linguistic competence of young children should be trained by a variety of sophisticated teaching models.

Other initiatives for major adjustments of the (former) O.S.M. project concern the educational responses to ethnic minority groups, and their language situation in particular. The amount of multicultural classrooms in Rotterdam has risen dramatically over the last few decades. Research activities may help to define better the causal chains behind ethnic underachievement. A special area of concern is how to integrate rather isolated areas of migrant pedagogies (such as several aspects of intercultural teaching, mother tongue education, etc.) and effective school theories into a common strategy.

These and other examples suggest that during O.S.M., research has been quite important for the instrumentation of compensation and enrichment programmes. Meanwhile, the project was rather immune for major environmental changes. One might also doubt whether O.S.M. adjusted well to recent insights into the hard core of deprivation and underachievement into the diversified Rotterdam school population. One cannot blame O.S.M. for that; the simplest reason is that project outlines, target groups and objectives have been worked out in a long lasting contract. Nevertheless, the question remains whether a more flexible respons to external circumstances and scientific insights may be helpful in the near future. The paradox of O.S.M. may well be that the strenght of having an explicit rationality in outline and infrastructure produced a certain weakness in adequate responses to the ideals of equity in a rapid changing school population that needs frequent diagnosing of deprivation and underachievement. More small-scale experiments that combine mainstream efforts

may help to change for the better. These may produce insights if and how adjustments in project activities should take place. Better research, of course. But also a greater variety of research for better programmes and pupil results. If so, educational research may win another functionality: a corrective function on "well-organised, well structured, and well-thought out" projects such as O.S.M. in the eighties and new compensation and enrichment programmes in the nineties.

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